

FACTORS INFLUENCING EARLY MARRIAGE AMONG FEMALE TEENAGERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NNEWI SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

by

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Abstract:

This study aimed at the factors influencing early marriage among female teenagers in secondary schools in Nnewi South Local Government Area. The population of the study consists of one thousand seven hundred and twenty (1720) senior secondary school students in the twenty-six secondary school. Simple random sample was used to select six hundred and eight (608) students and a structured questionnaire containing twenty questions was used to elicit information from the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data that guided the study. The findings of the study revealed that economic factor, peer group influence, parental influence, culture of the people among others influenced early marriage among teenage female students in Nnewi local government area of Anambra state. Based on the findings some recommendations and suggestion were made.

Keywords: Factors, Influence, Early marriage, Female Teenagers

Introduction

Marriage according to Macmillan dictionary (2009), refers to the relationship between two people who are husband and wife. Marriage is a legally recognised union between a man and a woman in which they are united sexually, cooperate economically, may have children through birth or adoption as cited by Devout and Sayad (2008). Marriage which is also called matrimony or wedlock is a socially or ritually recognised union between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between those spouses as well as between them and any resulting biological or adopted children and affinity (in-laws and other family members through marriages). The definition of

marriage varies not only between cultures or religion but also within one's lineage evolving to extended relations. It is principally an institution in which interpersonal relationship usually sexual are acknowledged or sanctioned. In some cultures, marriage is recommended or considered to be compulsory before pursuing any sexual intimacy.

Marriage is a recognized union of a man and woman for the primary purpose of procreation according to Obiadi (2008). Marriage grants a legal status on those that indulged in it. Every society has what is known as marriage but the only outstanding thing to note is the difference in

performance of the ceremonies. According to Bernard (2006), marriage is a contract between a man and a woman who are juristically capable of contracting marriage by which each gives and accepts the perpetual and exclusive right to act suitably for the generation of offspring. Marriage on the other hand is looked at by Anderson and Perker (2000), as the institution sanctioned by the society to establish durable bonds between male and female and permits sexual intercourse for the establishment of a family.

Marriage dates back to the history of mankind. Throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a mild stone in adult life. Marriage is actually a universal social institution as through which an adult male and female generally involved acquire new social status as husband and wife. Furthermore, it is through marriage that the children born by the women are recognized as legitimate offspring of both partners (Queries, 2008).

Sadly, this days, the practice of early marriage gives no room for celebration as such an important social institution brings numerous problems to the couple especially when it happens at an early age. Early marriage which is also referred to as child marriage is common all over the globe and has inflicted dangerous and devastating effects on young children especially females who are compelled to tie the knot in most cases (UNICEF, 2001). When this happens, a girl's childhood is cut short and their fundamental rights compromised. The young girls are robbed into roles which they are not psychologically and physically prepared. Many have no choice on timing or the partner. Some are coerced while others are too young to make an informed decision. Premature marriage deprives them of the opportunity for personal development as well as their right to full reproductive health well-being, education and participation in civil life (UNICEF 2001).

There are still reports of early marriage in certain Ibo communities but the practice of forced marriage among the Easterners has died down and no longer wide spread, (Onobong 2003). As of now, 44% of girls in Nigeria are married before their 18th birthday and 18% are married before the age of 15. Child marriage is particularly common among Nigeria's poorest rural household and the Hausa ethnic group (Allen and Oluwatornipe 2013). The factors that place a girl child at the risk of early marriage includes among others, search for economic survival, protection of young girls, peer group, family pressure, controlling female behaviour and sexuality, wars, civil conflicts and maximization of fertility where infant mortality is high (UNICEF, 2001).

Early marriage is the uniting or informal marriage of children under 18 years of age with a much older man. Cohen, Cong and Dame (1980), argued that the teenage mother usually forget education and even those who return to school do not continue as fast as their peers who did not become pregnant during their teenage period resulting from marriage distractions. Mkpe (2007), cited that early marriage might cause a very dangerous health complication in young girls. One of such major complications of early marriage is Vesico Vaginal Fistula or (VVF) which is an abnormal extending between the bladder and the vagina which allows the continuous involuntary discharge of urine into the vaginal vault. This condition afflicts young girls due to prolonged and obstructed labour. (Ekele and Dikko, 2009).

Marriage is a natural right of every human being. Early marriage poses many problems in the educational attainment of female secondary school students. Early marriage adversely affects the girl's future, academic pursuit and social life. Parents, teachers and government are all concerned about the ugly development of early marriage in many

ethnic groups in Nigeria. Girls who married before the age of eighteen have their childhood cut short as they are presented with the responsibility of being a wife and mother at a very tender age in life which is usually very difficult for them to cope.

When girls get married under 18 years, they are more likely to experience domestic violence due to the fact that they are under age before going into marriage with their spouses usually older than them. It is on the above issues that the researcher wants to find out the factors influencing early marriage among female teenagers in secondary schools in Nnewi South Local Government Area of Anambra State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to find out the factors influencing early marriage among teenage females in secondary schools in Nnewi south local government area.

Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Determine how economic factors can influence early marriage among teenage female students.
2. Identify peer group influences on early marriage among teenage females.
3. Identify how parental influence can lead to early marriage among teenage females.
4. Determine how culture of the society can influence early marriage among teenage females.

Research Question

The following research questions guided the study.

1. To what extent does economic factor influence early marriage among teenage female students?
2. Does peer group influence early marriage among teenage females?

3. To what extent does parental influence lead to early marriage among teenage females?

4. To what extent does culture of the society influence early marriage among teenage females.

Methodology

A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The study was carried out in secondary schools in Nnewi South Local Government Area. There are twenty- six secondary schools in Nnewi South. The study concentrated on female and mixed secondary schools, which is fifteen from ten towns. 608 samples out of the (1720) population of the students were used for the study. Questionnaire item was used as instrument for data collection. It contained two parts section A and B. Section A provided personal data of the respondents while section B comprised 20 item questions which the students were requested to respond to. Four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) were used. The instrument was given to three experts in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education. Nwafor Orizu College of Education to validate after which some corrections were made. A test retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument by giving it to fifty students in Onitsha Education Zone. Data collected was tested using pearson product moment correlation coefficient and found to be 0.86 which was high enough for the study. The researcher administered the questionnaire directly to the students with the aid of two research assistants and all the questionnaire was collected giving a return rate of 100%. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation. All responses greater than 2.50 are regarded as agree while responses less than 2.50 are regarded as Disagree.

Results – The results of data analysis are shown in table 1 -4.

Research Questions 1:

To what extent does economic factor influence early marriage among female teenage students?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation on how Economic Factors can Influence Early Marriage among Teenage Female Students.

N = 608

S/No	Items	Σfx	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	Parental poverty is a major factor leading to early marriage of the girl child.	2089	3.4	12.6	Accepted
2.	Lack of finance by the parents results to early marriage.	2041	3.4	11.8	Accepted
3	Economic hardship of the parents of a teenager leads to early marriage.	1973	3.3	11.3	Accepted
4	Lack of funds on the family especially for family upkeep can make a teenager succumb to early marriage	1943	3.3	11.1	Accepted
5	Financial incapacitation may lead to early marriage.	1777	2.8	8.9	Accepted
6.	Lack of sponsor for educational support can lead to early marriage of teenagers.	1901	3.1	10.8	Accepted

From table 1 above, items 1 – 6 with derived mean score of 3.4, 3.4, 3.3, 3.3, 2.8 and 3.1 respectively were all accepted since their mean scores are greater than the decision rule of 2.50. This indicated that all the items in the table are accepted as factors influencing early marriage of the teenagers.

Research Question 2

Does peer group influence early marriage among teenage females?

Table 2: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on how Peer Group Influences Early Marriage among Teenage Females.

S/No	Items	Σfx	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
7	Peer pressure can lead to early marriage	1962	3.2	11.3	Accepted
8	Early sexual exposure in secondary school by peer group can lead to early marriage	1929	3.2	10.9	Accepted
9.	Bad advice by the peer group can lead to early marriage.	1976	3.3	11.3	Accepted
10.	Online and network exposure by peer group can lead to early marriage.	1984	3.3	11.5	Accepted
11.	Advice of the peer group on social media can lead to early marriage.	1816	2.98	9.9	Accepted

From table 2 above, items 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 with derived mean scores of 3.2, 3.2, 3.3, 3.3 and 2.98 respectively were all accepted since their mean scores are above the criterion mean

of 2.50. This indicated that all the items are accepted as peer group influence on early marriage.

Research Question 3

To what extent does parental influence lead to early marriage among teenage females?

Table 3: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on the Extent Parental Influence can lead to Early Marriage among Teenage Females.

N = 608					
S/No	Items	Σfx	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
12.	Illiteracy of the parents contribute to early marriage	1817	2.98	9.9	Accepted
13.	Lack of law awareness related to child marriage contribute to early teenage marriage.	1899	3.1	10.8	Accepted
14.	Lack of parental commitment towards training of teenage girls contribute to early marriage.	1832	3.0	10	Accepted
15.	Parental desires to get their daughters married to influential families in the society contribute to early marriage.	2000	3.3	11.7	Accepted
16	Parental fear of their daughters getting pregnant while at home contribute to early teenage marriage.	1994	3.3	11.6	Accepted

From table 3 above, items 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 with mean scores of 2.98, 3.1, 3.01, 3.3 and 3.3 respectively were all accepted since their mean scores are greater than decision rule of 2.50. This indicated that all the five items in table 3 were accepted.

Research Question 4

To what extent does culture of the society influence early marriage among teenage females?

Table 4: Mean Rating and Standard Deviation on How Culture of the Society Influences Early Marriage among Teenage Female.

N = 608					
S/No	Items	Σfx	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
17.	Societal pressure can lead to early teenage marriage	1973	3.2	11.3	Accepted
18	Many societies have marital norms that limit age of young girls to enter into marriage.	1705	2.8	9.9	Accepted
19	Many cultures see early marriage of teenage girls as a blessing hence the indulgement	1899	3.1	10.5	Accepted
20	Tradition is a major factor leading to early marriage of teenage females.	2081	3.4	12.1	Accepted

From table 4 above, items 17, 18, 19 and 20 with derived mean scores of 3.2, 2.8, 3.1 and 3.4 respectively were all accepted and as such indicated as cultural influence on early teenage marriage.

Discussion

Research question one (1) examines how economic factor can influence early marriage among the teenage females. The findings of the study proved that lack of financial resources, economic hardship on the parents, lack of funds, financial incapacitation and lack of sponsor for educational support can all lead to early marriage of teenage females. Amah (2010), describes marriage as a house of cards as people seen to contract marriage the way children build houses with cards, no sooner are couples courted, marriage is contracted and also dissolved. The children's education will be destroyed as they will not have proper upbringing and decent education. He stated further that due to poor education of the couple, divorce always follow early marriage. This situation occurs because they cannot cope with trend and demand of time.

In research question two (2) examining how peer group influences early marriage, the findings supported peer pressure, early sexual involvement, bad advice from peer and social networking from peers as factors that can lead to early teenage female marriage. These findings are in agreement with Mkpe (2007), who noted that early marriage might cause health complications in young girls like vesicovaginal fistula or VVF. This condition is presented when the young girls are exposed to prolonged obstructed labour.

In table three (3) showcasing research question three (3) which examines the extent parental influence can lead to early marriage, the findings showed that illiteracy, lack of parental commitment, lack of awareness of law, desire of parents to marry off their daughters to affluent families and fear of their daughters getting pregnant lead

to early marriage. These findings are in agreement with Bernard (2006), who noted that marriage is a contract (covenant) between men and women who are juristically capable of contracting marriage which gives and accepts the perpetual and exclusive right to act suitable for the generation of offspring.

Research question four (4) examined how the culture of the society can influence early marriage among teenage females. The findings from the respondents confirmed that the culture of the society can influence early marriage. Pressure from the society, age norms and the people's tradition can all influence early teenage female marriage. On these cultural views, Okoro (2011), states that culturally speaking not every African man finds joy in educating their daughters especially where he sees them as passer-by Africans are not poor but consider it un-african to send females to schools as they will become another family's property especially in the northern part of the country. This idea is also supported by Allen and Oluwatomipe (2013), that states that in Nigeria 44% of girls are married before their 18th birthday while 28% are married before the age of 15 which is common among Nigeria poorest rural household and the Hausa ethnic groups. Many parents want high bride price on their daughters yet they find it difficult to give them good education.

Conclusion

United Nations (1990), supported that throughout the world, marriage is regarded as a moment of celebration and a mild stone in adult life. Sadly, the practice of early marriage gives no such guarantee and cultural influences that pushes young teenage girls into marriage leads to quick divorce. Early marriage contributes to many health problems leading to negative consequences to both the teenage female students, family and society at large. Early marriage of teenage female students should not be encouraged no matter the circumstances as such situation leaves the

girl child mother shattered when faced with difficulties in the marriage since they are not physically, mentally, psychologically and emotionally prepared for the marriage. The teenage mothers are usually sexually and physically abused by their much older spouses. In a situation where their spouse is of the same age, they take their wife as sex toys and instrument of experimentation. Since they are not yet mentally matured.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made.

1. Adequate re-orientation on some cultural practices should be carried out.
2. Aggressive public enlightenment campaign to check early marriage among female teenagers from schools should be encouraged.
3. There should be legislation on compulsory female education in Nigeria.
4. Religious heads should encourage their members to have values towards education of female teenagers.
5. Non-governmental agencies can aid in mounting of bill boards showing the ills of early marriage.
6. Traditional rulers should look into the cultures that support early girl child marriage and amend them positively.
7. Education should be made really free by the government especially at the basic classes to encourage parents in sending their teenage female daughters to school.

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